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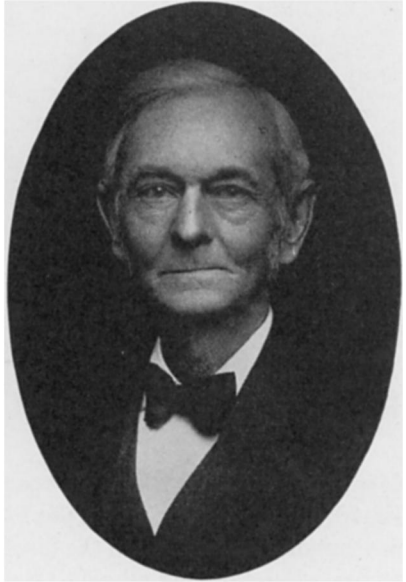
# BRIEFER ARTICLES

## CHARLES HORTON PECK

(WITH PORTRAITS)

Dr. CHARLES HORTON PECK, for many years Botanist of New York State, died at his home in Menands, New York, on July 11, 1917. He suffered a light stroke early in November 1912. A severe one in the spring of 1913 rendered him incapable of further work. Soon after this he presented his resignation as State Botanist, but it was not accepted by the Regents of the University of the State of New York until January 26, 1915. A testimonial minute was recorded at the time by the Regents, citing Dr. PECK's valuable services to the state and to science by his conscientious and untiring labors. Dr. PECK was greatly depressed early in 1912 by the death of his wife, and by the news that the herbarium would have to be moved from the Old Agricultural Hall to the new quarters in the State Education Building.

He was born at Sand Lake (now called Averill Park), New York, March 30, 1833. He graduated from the State Normal School at Albany in 1852. He then taught for three years in Schram's Collegiate Institute at Sand Lake. He entered Union College, Schenectady, in 1855, and graduated in 1859. He resumed his teaching at the Collegiate Institute in Sand Lake for three or four years. In 1862 or 1863 he was appointed teacher of Latin and Greek in the Albany Classical Institute, known more popularly as Cass's Institute, as it was presided over by AMOS CASS.



Here Dr. PECK is said to have become "an accomplished classical scholar, but his real interest lay all the time in the world of plants and flowers" (The Knickerbocker Press, Albany, July 12, 1917). It is evident, therefore, that for some time Dr. PECK had been engaged in the collection and study of plants. It may be a matter of interest to botanists to know the circumstance which first aroused his interest in botanical investigation which was so soon to supersede his interest in the classics. On two different occasions the writer had the opportunity of collecting and studying fungi for a week with Dr. PECK, first in the Adirondack



Mountains at Lake Piseco in 1902, and then at Port Jefferson, Long Island, in 1904. While at Lake Piseco Dr. PECK told the writer of the first impulse he received in the direction of the study of the lower plants. It was while teaching school at Sand Lake (probably in Schram's Collegiate Institute). One of his duties in those days appears to have been to help keep up the fire. While putting wood into the stove he was constantly attracted by the lichens and mosses growing on the bark. This gave him a desire to know something about the mosses. He got into communication with several students of the mosses at that time, probably LESQUEREUX<sup>1</sup> first, and later with C. F. AUSTIN.

<sup>1</sup> Rept. N.Y. State Cab. Nat. Hist. 19:42. 1866.

Dr. PECK states<sup>2</sup> that ELLIOT C. HOWE, while at Fort Edwards, directed his attention to the study of the fungi and induced him to take up this field of investigation. He told the writer that he was advised to correspond with M. C. COOKE<sup>3</sup> of London concerning the fungi. This relation with COOKE is shown by the large number of new species of fungi published by PECK, in his early work, ascribed to COOKE and PECK. It appears that he received assistance in the determination of fungi from M. A. CURTIS before he became associated with COOKE. The first new species published by him was "*Septoria viridetingens* Curtis in litt.," in the 23d Rept. 55, 1873,<sup>4</sup> PECK being completely responsible for the diagnosis. He was, therefore, in correspondence with CURTIS at least as early as 1869, and probably earlier. During this period he was in correspondence also with other early students of the fungi, RAVE, PETERS, MICHENER, GERARD, FROST, and the Rev. J. BLAKE in this country. He had an extensive correspondence and exchange of specimens, not only with COOKE, but with other European mycologists, as DE THÜMEN, ROUMEGUÉRE, and others. Dr. PECK told the writer that he was advised to correspond with M. C. COOKE.

In the 18th Report (for 1864) of the Regents of the State of New York there is a catalogue of the mosses which were presented to the State Museum by Dr. PECK (pp. 193-196, 1864). In the 19th Report (for 1865, pp. 42-70, 1866) there is a list of the mosses of the state of New York by him. In the 20th Report (for 1866) there is an article by

<sup>2</sup> Bull Torr. Bot. Club 26:253. 1899.

<sup>3</sup> I have since forgotten the name of the person who made the recommendation, but it was one of three persons: E. C. HOWE, who had relations with the Rev. M. C. CURTIS of North Carolina, CURTIS himself, or the Rev. E. C. BOLLES, a Universalist clergyman of Salem, Massachusetts. Dr. FARLOW informs me that BOLLES, in the early seventies, was a well known popular lecturer on botany and zoology, and a great admirer of COOKE, who sent him many colored drawings and pamphlets on fungi. As BOLLES traveled about the country a great deal, he may have met CHARLES PECK; but the weight of evidence seems to indicate HOWE or CURTIS as the one who suggested COOKE to him. In this connection I wish to express my obligations to Dr. W. G. FARLOW, Mrs. E. G. BRITTON, Dr. H. D. HOUSE, the present State Botanist, and Mr. HARRY S. PECK, whom I recently met in Albany, for assistance in obtaining some of this information.

<sup>4</sup> This was the report for 1869, transmitted to the legislature March 10, 1870. In a letter to the writer, December 14, 1912, Dr. PECK stated that "the 23rd Report was published in 1873 as stated therein. A fire in the publishing house of Weed Parsons and Co. delayed the publication of the 23rd, so that the 24th got ahead of it." It is stated by some, however, that a separate of the botanical 23d Report was published in 1872.

him on "Facts and observations touching the flora of the state of New York" (pp. 403-410, 1867). This indicates that he was in touch with the scientific work of the Museum (then the State Cabinet of Natural History) before his appointment to the staff, and evidently enjoyed a close acquaintance with one of the Regents, himself a botanist, G. W. CLINTON, of Buffalo. He was appointed Botanist of the Museum in 1867. In 1883 the legislature created the position of State Botanist, to which Dr. PECK was appointed and which he held until his retirement in 1915.

He was most celebrated for his taxonomic studies and publications on the fungi, although seed plants, ferns, and mosses received considerable attention in nearly all of his reports, and quite a number of new species of seed plants were described by him. His activities in this field were not confined to New York State. He had many correspondents from all parts of the United States and Canada. His reports as State Botanist began with the 21st Museum Report for 1867 (published in 1868), and the last one by him was the Museum Report for 1912 (Bulletin 167, 1913). These reports have carried the name and work of Dr. PECK to all parts of the scientific world. With few exceptions the new species of fungi described in these reports included only those from New York State. Some of the early ones were published in the *Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural History* and in the *Transactions of the Albany Institute of Arts and Sciences*. New species from territory outside of the state were mostly published in his numerous contributions to the BOTANICAL GAZETTE and to the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club*, dating from the very early history of these journals. His work covered all the groups of the fungi, and the new species described by him number between 2000 and 3000. A list of those published up to 1908 is given in the Museum Bulletin no. 131, pp. 59-190, 1909. These reports of the State Botanist have been in great demand by students of fungi, especially because there had been no manual of the fungi of North America.

The monographs of certain genera of the agarics form a very valuable feature of his work, particularly those appearing in a number of his later reports. His monograph of the Boleti of the United States (N.Y. State Mus. Bull. no. 8, 1889) should also be mentioned. He gave considerable attention to testing the edible properties of the fleshy fungi, as several of his reports testify. It is unfortunate that he was not able to complete monographs of all the genera of the agarics. During the

later years of his activity considerable time was given to study and collecting the Crataegi of the state for the State Herbarium.

Dr. PECK possessed a very critical and analytical mind. Many of his descriptions of new species are marvels of accuracy and clearness. On the two occasions when I had the opportunity of working with him in the field I was impressed by these qualities manifested in a marked degree. Each day he made a careful study of his collections, with full notes and often accompanied by colored drawings, from which were selected those for color reproduction in his reports. The photograph presented here, showing him at work, was made by the writer in his room at the hotel in Port Jefferson in 1904. On the table are some of the fungi, his water color blocks, and a color chart made by himself which he used for many years. Perhaps in some respects he was, at times, too critical, which may have led him to distinguish as different species environmental and growth forms of the same species, but in this respect he did not differ from most other taxonomists. This faculty, however, may be regarded as a virtue compared with the careless "lumping" so characteristic of some students who have taken a plunge into monographic work in the fungi without an adequate background of critical studies of the morphology and structure of the fleshy fungi in a fresh state. That a number of European species have been described by PECK (and others) as new is not surprising when we consider the poor and meager descriptions which appeared in the earlier, and some modern, European works on mycology.

This leads the writer to mention some of the other difficulties under which Dr. PECK labored. There has been a lamentable lack of proper equipment in apparatus, exsiccati, and of assistance in the Botanical Division of the State Museum, not to mention the very inadequate rooms and space which were assigned to the State Botanist. The latter feature has been vastly improved in the botanical quarters in the new Education Building, although even now there is no room suitably lighted for microscopic work. Dr. PECK, through nearly all the 48 years of his official connection with the Museum, worked single-handed and alone, carrying on his vast correspondence by hand, and caring as best he could for the large number of specimens collected by himself and communicated by his correspondents. Partly for this reason, and partly due to the fact that when the botanist's quarters were moved to the attic of the Capitol Building, most of the collections, for want of room, were bundled up and almost inaccessible; the collections

for a number of years were in a very chaotic state. When they were moved to the Agricultural Hall, some order began to come out of this chaos, and further improvement was introduced when an assistant (S. H. BURNHAM) was appointed. The present State Botanist, Dr. H. D. HOUSE, still has but one assistant. Nevertheless, the collections are being arranged in a more orderly manner; many of the types have been marked, and all are more accessible to students. For the care of this very valuable collection, and for the continuance and upbuilding of the botanical interests of the State Museum, New York should be more generous than it has been thus far.

Dr. PECK was a life member of the Botanical Society of America, a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, member of the American Forestry Association, of the Albany Institute of Arts and Science, of the National Geographic Society, of the Torrey Botanical Club, and an honorary member of the New England Botanical Club.

The state and mycological science owe Dr. PECK a fund of gratitude for what he has accomplished in spite of the many difficulties and discouragements under which he labored. This recognition of his labors has been partly made by a testimonial to him, in the shape of a collection of colored models of some of the more important large fungi, which is displayed in the main museum room on the fifth floor of the Education Building.—GEO. F. ATKINSON, *Cornell University*.